**What is procurement?**

**Partnering with Third Parties:**

**Quick-Start Guide to Procurement**

* **Procurement is the process of acquiring goods or services from an external party.** Many functions of government involve contracting with private vendors. Several mechanisms exist to procure goods and services in Rhode Island, including request for quotes (RFQ), request for proposals (RFP), sole source, single source, master price agreement (MPA), and continuous recruitment MPA. For information on which type of procurement best fits your needs, access the Agency Resource Center (ARC) on the Division of Purchases website (link below).

**Why is procurement important?**

* **Procurement is an opportunity for your team to assess progress and consider opportunities for improvement.** Your department should examine what it is contracting for, how those vendors are performing, and how this impacts your team’s goals or performance. It’s a chance to think about what might be done differently and what new solutions exist for the problem your team is trying to solve. Procurement is an important part of your team’s strategy to achieve your mission and goals.

**There seem to be a lot of procurement rules – Why?**

* **Procurement rules are in place to ensure vendors have equal opportunity to do business with the state.** Rhode Island procurement laws and regulations support transparency and level the playing field among potential vendors. To ensure no vendor is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged, all potential vendors must have access to the same information at the same time about any solicitation. Sharing information with any one or select group of potential vendors, even inadvertently, risks disqualifying that/those organization(s) from bidding on the solicitation.

**How do I get started? What resources are available to me?**

* **Get started early!** Critical procurements, including those most integral to your department’s mission, take time. They require nuanced thinking about your team’s needs, what kind of procurement best suits those needs, and what solutions exist in the marketplace. Doing this work up front allows the procurement process to move more smoothly. Purchases recommends beginning the process at least nine months prior to the desired contract signing date for an RFP,as an RFP typically involves conducting a needs assessment (2 mos.), drafting a solicitation (1 mo.), posting the solicitation (2 mos.), scoring proposals (2 mos.), and issuing an award (2 mos.).[[1]](#footnote-1) Purchases recommends the RFQ process be initiated at least 3 months prior to the desired contract signing date.
* **Begin with an assessment of your team’s needs and relevant policy considerations.** After consulting your leadership and agreeing to pursue a procurement, the process begins by articulating your business need – the objective your team is trying to accomplish. By expressing in writing what success looks like before you ask vendors to help get you there, you are better able to make objective decisions that best serve the state’s needs. At a minimum, consider these questions:
	+ What is the challenge, innovation, or change that this procurement will address?
	+ What would you like the solution to achieve? What benefits will come from implementing it?
	+ How will you measure how well the good or service procured solves the problem at hand?
	+ How will solutions used to address this problem elsewhere inform this procurement?
	+ What is your budget? Are there other constraints for this purchase that need to be considered?
* **Agency Resource Center:** The Agency Resource Center (ARC) contains materials that departments may find helpful for procurement, such as templates, checklists, training materials, and policies. Access the ARC at: <http://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/Navigation.aspx>
* **Rhode Island Division of Purchases**: The Division of Purchases can assist you with the procurement process. Contact the Division of Purchases at (401) 574-8100, or access the organization chart on the ARC (link above).
1. Timelines are approximate and are intended for planning purposes only. v. 10/13/17 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)